The Broadcast Meteorologist as Station Scientist

by

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Broadcast meteorologists are often the only people in television newsrooms who have a background in science. That makes them qualified not just to deliver the weather, but also to provide more science news to the viewing audience.

The American Meteorological Society (AMS), the nation's premier professional organization for those in the atmospheric and related sciences, is promoting the notion of regarding broadcast meteorologists as the "station scientists," and equipping them to cover a broader range of science topics for their station, in addition to tomorrow's weather. This would include environmental and space issues, weather and climate impacts on public health, transportation, agriculture, energy use, and other topics.

In January 2005, the AMS will introduce a new program called the Certified Broadcast Meteorologist (CBM) program, intended to raise the professional standard in broadcast meteorology and encourage a broader range of scientific understanding, especially with respect to environmental issues.

The CBM program is an "upgrade" to the current AMS Seal of Approval. The Seal was launched in 1957 when the Board on Broadcast Meteorology was formed. The Board began evaluating television and radio tapes in late 1959 and the first Seals of Approval were granted soon after. To date, over 1300 Television and over 150 Radio Seals of Approval have been awarded.

The Seal of Approval is awarded to broadcast meteorologists whose on-air presentations meet established criteria for scientific competence and effective communication skills. Seals have been awarded to meteorologists with widely varied approaches to presenting the weathercast. Among radio and television meteorologists, the Seal of Approval is sought as a mark of distinction. Seal holders are highly respected among their peers. Professional meteorologists have confidence that weather presentations made by Seal holders will be technically sound and responsibly delivered. The general public can have equal confidence in the quality and reliability of weather presentations made by broadcast meteorologists approved by the Society.

The CBM Program will raise the bar even higher, making the meteorologists even more valuable to news organizations. Current AMS Seal holders who wish to receive the new CBM designation will be required to pass an examination demonstrating their basic competence in atmospheric science. The test will also include questions on a broader range of scientific issues. New applicants after January 2005 must also hold at least a Bachelor of Science degree in atmospheric science, or the equivalent.

All broadcast meteorologists certified by the AMS will be required to participate in a program of Continuing Professional Development to maintain their certification, in order to ensure that CBMs and Seal holders remain current in the sciences. The program will be structured to strongly encourage a broader understanding of science topics, especially those related to the environment. To support this, AMS will expand its repertoire of education and training opportunities for broadcast meteorologists.

We know that meteorologists are a valuable part of the news team. AMS hopes changes in the AMS Seal Program and new continuing educational requirements will help newsrooms see their "station scientists" as a valuable resource to cover a much broader range of science topics and news stories.